

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method and apparatus are disclosed for managing network devices using a parsable string that conforms to a specified grammar. The parsable string is used to represent locations of entities and is called an entity location specifier. The grammar may conform to Augmented Backus-Naur Form (ABNF). The entity location specifier comprises one or more location elements taken from a superset of location elements needed to specify the locations of entities for network device platforms. The superset of location elements can include both physical and logical entities. As a result, a network management application can retrieve a description of entities and elements contained in a network device using a single request, and can receive a single string value that is parsable to identify individual entities or elements in the device.